

# T E S T I M O N Y

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## *Lessons of 9/11*

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## **LESSONS OF 9/11**

### **Joint Inquiry Staff Request \***

*Response from*

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**8 October 2002**

**It should be emphasized that the views and conclusions expressed herein are those of Dr. Bruce Hoffman *only* and do not represent those of any organizations or entities to which he is affiliated.**

**How has the threat terrorists pose to the United States changed since the end of the cold war?**

Starting in the early 1990s, terrorism underwent a profound change. New adversaries, with new motivations and new rationales surfaced to challenge much of the conventional wisdom on both terrorists and terrorism. Critically, many analysts both inside and external to government were slow to recognize these changes or even worse dismissed them. Accordingly, throughout most of the 1990s our conceptions and policies remained largely the same, dating from terrorism's emergence as a global security problem more than thirty years before. These conceptions originated, and took hold, during the Cold War: when radical left-wing terrorist groups then active throughout the

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\* This testimony responds to a list of specific questions posed by the Joint Inquiry Staff to the author which are addressed in this statement for the record *ad seriatim*.

world were widely regarded as posing the most serious threat to Western security.<sup>1</sup> The irrelevance of this thinking to various aspects of the "new terrorist" problem as it crystallized during the 1990s is perhaps most clearly evidenced by the changes in our notions of the "stereotypical-type terrorist organization."

Terrorist groups, for example, were once recognizable mostly as a collection of individuals belonging to an organization with a well-defined command and control apparatus, who were engaged in conspiracy as a full-time avocation, living underground while constantly planning and plotting terrorist attacks and who at times were under the direct control, or operating at the express behest of, a foreign government.<sup>2</sup> These groups, moreover, had a defined set of political, social or economic objectives and often issued communiqués taking credit for and explaining their actions. Accordingly, however disagreeable or repugnant the terrorists and their tactics may have been, we at least knew who they were and what they wanted.

During the past decade, however, these more "traditional" and familiar types of ethnic/nationalist-separatist and ideological organizations<sup>3</sup> were joined by a variety of "entities" with arguably less comprehensible nationalist or ideological motivations. This "new generation" of terrorist groups embraced not only far more amorphous religious and sometimes millenarian aims but also were less cohesive organizational entities, with a more diffuse structure and membership. In this respect, the emergence of either obscure, idiosyncratic millenarian movements<sup>4</sup> or zealously nationalist religious groups<sup>5</sup> represented a very different and potentially far more lethal threat than the more "traditional" terrorist adversaries.

For example, although the total volume of terrorist incidents world-wide declined in the 1990s, according to Department of State statistics presented in the annual *Global*

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<sup>1</sup>Some observers argued that these groups were in fact part of a world-wide communist plot orchestrated by Moscow and implemented by its client states. See especially Claire Sterling, *The Terror Network: The Secret War of International Terrorism* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1981).

<sup>2</sup>To cite the most obvious, and perhaps best known, example: In the late 1980s, Colonel Qaddafi reputedly commissioned the Japanese Red Army (JRA) to carry out attacks against American and British targets (in retaliation for the 1986 U.S. air strike against Libya). The JRA used the name "Anti-Imperialist International Brigades" in claiming responsibility for these operations.

<sup>3</sup>That is, the variety of aforementioned radical leftist (e.g., Marxist-Leninist/Maoist/Stalinist movements) organizations active in years past (such as Germany's Red Army Faction and Italy's Red Brigades) as well as the such stereotypical ethnic/nationalist and separatist terrorist groups like the PLO, PIRA, Basque ETA, etc.

<sup>4</sup>Such as the Japanese Aum Shinrikyo religious sect who committed the March 1995 nerve gas attack on the Tokyo subway.

<sup>5</sup>Such as Hamas, Palestine Islamic Jihad, the Egyptian Islamic Jihad, the Egyptian Islamic Organizations, the Armed Islamic Group in Algeria and, of course, al-Qa'ida.

*Patterns of International Terrorism* publications, the proportion of persons killed in terrorist incidents generally increased. Hence, while terrorists were arguably less active, they were nonetheless becoming more lethal. The reasons for terrorism's increasing lethality are complex and variegated, but can generally be attributed to the change in the motivations and intentions as embodied in the growth of the number of terrorist groups motivated by a religious imperative.

The emergence of terrorism motivated by a religious imperative encapsulates the confluence of new adversaries, motivations and rationales affecting terrorist patterns today. The connection between religion and terrorism is not new.<sup>6</sup> However, while religion and terrorism do share a long history, until the 1990s this particular variant had largely been overshadowed by ethnic- and nationalist-separatist or ideologically motivated terrorism. Indeed, none of the 11 identifiable terrorist groups<sup>7</sup> active in 1968 (the year credited with marking the advent of modern, international terrorism) could be classified as "religious."<sup>8</sup> Not until 1980 in fact—as a result of the repercussions from the revolution in Iran the year before—do the first "modern" religious terrorist groups appear:<sup>9</sup> but they amount to only two of the 64 groups active that year. Twelve years later, however, the number of religious terrorist groups had increased nearly six-fold, representing a quarter (11 of 48) of the terrorist organizations who carried out attacks in 1992. Significantly, this trend not only continued, but accelerated. By 1994, a third (16) of the 49 identifiable terrorist groups could be classified as religious in character and/or motivation. In 1995, their number increased yet again, to account for nearly half (26 or 46 percent) of the 56 known terrorist groups active that year. Thus, by the middle of the decade, the rise of religious terrorism was clear.

The violent record of various Shi'a Islamic groups during the prior decade already evidenced the higher levels of lethality of religious terrorism. For example, although

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<sup>6</sup>As David C. Rapoport points out in his seminal study of what he terms "holy terror," until the nineteenth century, "religion provided the only acceptable justifications for terror" (see David C. Rapoport, "Fear and Trembling: Terrorism in Three Religious Traditions," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 78, No. 3, September 1984, p. 659).

<sup>7</sup>Numbers of active, *identifiable* terrorist groups from 1968 to the present are derived from The RAND Chronology of International Terrorist Incidents.

<sup>8</sup>Admittedly, many contemporary terrorist groups—such as the overwhelmingly Catholic Provisional Irish Republic Army; their Protestant counterparts arrayed in various Loyalist paramilitary groups like the Ulster Freedom Fighters, the Ulster Volunteer Force, and the Red Hand Commandos; and the predominantly Muslim Palestine Liberation Organization—all have a strong religious component by dint of their membership. However, it is the political and not the religious aspect that is the dominant characteristic of these groups, as evidenced by the pre-eminence of their nationalist and/or irredentist aims.

<sup>9</sup>The Iranian-backed Shi'a groups *al-Dawa* and the Committee for Safeguarding the Islamic Revolution.

these organizations committed only eight percent of all recorded international terrorist incidents between 1982 and 1989, they were nonetheless responsible for nearly 30 percent of the total number of deaths during that period.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, some of the most significant terrorist acts of recent years have all had some religious element present.<sup>11</sup> More disturbing is that in some instances the perpetrators' aims go beyond the establishment of some theocracy amenable to their specific deity,<sup>12</sup> but have embraced mystical, almost transcendental, and divinely inspired imperatives.<sup>13</sup>

Religious terrorism<sup>14</sup> tends to be more lethal than secular terrorism because of the radically different value systems, mechanisms of legitimization and justification, concepts of morality, and Manichean worldviews that directly affect the "holy terrorists" motivation. For the religious terrorist, violence first and foremost is a sacramental act or divine duty: executed in direct response to some theological demand or imperative and justified by scripture. Religion, therefore functions as a legitimizing force: specifically sanctioning wide scale violence against an almost open-ended category of opponents (e.g., all peoples who are not members of the religious terrorists' religion or cult). This explains why clerical sanction is so important for religious terrorists<sup>15</sup> and why religious

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<sup>10</sup>According to The RAND Chronology of International Terrorist Incidents, between 1982 and 1989 Shi'a terrorist groups committed 247 terrorist incidents but were responsible for 1057 deaths.

<sup>11</sup>These include: the July 1994 suicide bomb truck attack on a Jewish community center in Buenos Aires, Argentina; the March 1995 nerve-gas attack on the Tokyo subway perpetrated by a Japanese cult, the Aum Shinrikyo; the series of indiscriminate bombings that rocked France between July and October 1995 and again in December 1996; the assassination in November 1995 of Prime Minister Itzhak Rabin in Israel (and its attendant significance as the purported first step in a campaign of mass murder designed to disrupt the peace process); the bombings of a joint Saudi-American military training center in Riyadh in November 1995 and of a U.S. Air Force barracks in Dhahran the following June; the attack on Western tourists in Luxor in November 1997; the bloody succession of bloody suicide bombings carried out by Hamas and Palestine Islamic Jihad since 1994; and the al-Qa'ida attacks in recent years on the two U.S. embassies in East Africa, the U.S.S. Cole in Aden harbor, and of course the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks.

<sup>12</sup>For example, the creation of Islamic republics modeled on Iran in predominantly Muslim countries like Algeria, Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

<sup>13</sup>The Aum Shinrikyo's nerve-gas attacks on the Tokyo subway in March 1995 as part to overthrow the Japanese government and establish a new Japanese state based on the worship of the group's founder and Shokho Ashara.

<sup>14</sup>For a more complete and detailed discussion of this particular category of terrorist organization, see Bruce Hoffman, "Holy Terror": The Implications of Terrorism Motivated By A Religious Imperative," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, vol. 18, no. 4 (Winter 1995), which was also published in the RAND Paper series, under the same title, as P-7834 in July 1993. See also the more complete discussion in Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (NY: Columbia Univ. Press, 1998), pp. 87-130.

<sup>15</sup>For example, the *fatwa* (Islamic religious edict) issued by Iranian Shi'a clerics calling for Salman Rushdie's death; the "blessing" given to the bombing of New York City's World Trade Center by the Egyptian Sunni cleric, Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman; and the dispensation given by Jewish rabbis to right-wing Jewish extremist violence against Arabs in Israel and the West Bank and Gaza; the approval given by Islamic clerics in Lebanon for Hezbollah operations and by their counterparts in the Gaza Strip for Hamas attacks; and, the pivotal role played by Shoko Ashara, the religious leader of Japan's Aum sect, over his

figures are often required to “bless” (e.g., approve) terrorist operations before they are executed.

**Do Islamist radicals pose a different type of danger than do leftist or nationalist groups? How does the difference manifest itself?**

The most alarming aspect of the attacks on September 11<sup>th</sup> is that they conform to a trend in international terrorism that has emerged in recent years and has been almost exclusively linked to Islamic radicals: the infliction of mass, indiscriminate casualties by enigmatic adversaries, striking far beyond terrorism's traditional operational theaters in Europe and the Middle East. By contrast, terrorism, as noted above, was formerly practiced by distinct, numerically constrained organizational entities that had a defined set of political, social or economic objectives and who also often issued communiqués taking credit for, and explaining in great detail, their actions.<sup>16</sup> Hence, however disagreeable or distasteful their aims and motivations may have been, these groups' ideology and intentions were at least comprehensible—albeit politically radical and personally fanatical.

Most significantly, however, these more familiar terrorist groups engaged in highly selective and mostly discriminate acts of violence that were directed against a comparatively narrow range of targets. Moreover, rarely did these groups venture outside their self-proclaimed operational area (i.e., mostly their own or neighboring countries or established international centers and global cross-roads of diplomacy and commerce) to carry out attacks. Therefore Palestinian and Lebanese terrorists frequently operated in Europe and on occasion the IRA might strike in Germany or the ETA in France. For nearly three decades, the locus of *international* terrorism accordingly remained firmly entrenched in Europe and the Middle East. Only occasionally did it spill over into Asia and Latin America and almost never into Africa and the United States, itself (the sites of the most spectacular al-Qa'ida operations).

Finally, these groups were often numerically small. According to the U.S. Department of Defense, neither the Japanese Red Army nor the Red Army Faction, for example, ever numbered more than 20 to 30 hard-core members. The Red Brigades were hardly larger, with a total of fewer than 50 to 75 dedicated terrorists. Even the IRA and

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followers. Although bin Laden himself lacks formal theological training and credentials, he has nonetheless issued fatwas to justify al-Qa'ida attacks on American and other western targets, including against civilians.

<sup>16</sup>Indeed, some groups—like the Provisional Irish Republican Army—not only claimed responsibility for attacks, but also issued warnings in advance of such operations.

ETA could only call on the violent services of perhaps some 200-400 activists whilst the feared Abu Nidal Organization was limited to some 500 men-at-arms at any given time.<sup>17</sup>

The September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks, like those also perpetrated by Islamic radicals on the American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania three years earlier, diverge dramatically from these established patterns. First, rather than attempting either to limit casualties, the terrorists clearly intended to inflict widespread, indiscriminate casualties among thousands of innocent people in order to achieve their objective.

Second, both sets of coordinated, near-simultaneous terrorist operations occurred in regions of the world that had remained relatively outside the maelstrom of international terrorism. For exactly this reason, masterminds of the attacks probably regarded Kenya and Tanzania and later the United States as irresistibly attractive operational environments precisely because of this past immunity. This factor alone must send disquieting reverberations to other parts of the globe who have hitherto been unaffected by international terrorism. In this respect, *no country* can any longer feel completely secure. Already, in 1992 and again 1994, Argentina—a country similarly located in a region of the globe traditionally outside the ambit of international terrorism—became tragically enmeshed in distant struggles with the massive truck-bombings of the Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires and two years later of a Jewish community center in that same city.

In recent years, bin Laden not only publicly declared war on the United States because of its support for Israel and the presence of American military forces in Saudi Arabia, but has issued *fatwas*, or Islamic religious edicts, thereby endowing his calls for violence with an incontrovertible theological as well as political justification. To this end, tens of thousands reportedly have been trained by bin Laden in Afghanistan and the Sudan over the past decade.<sup>18</sup>

In sum, the resurgence of terrorism motivated by a religious imperative could hardly be more palpable or different from previous waves of terrorism over the past three decades.

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<sup>17</sup>See the authoritative membership figures published in the U.S. Department of Defense, *Terrorist Group Profiles* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1988), pp. 5, 35, 61, 64, 56, and 118.

<sup>18</sup>Douglas Frantz and Raymond Bonner, "Web of Terrorism: Investigators See Links to bin Laden in Gaza and Across Europe," *New York Times*, 23 September 2001.



### **Is al-Qa'ida a particularly dangerous unusual adversary?**

Al-Qa'ida is a particularly dangerous adversary because it is a remarkably adaptive and nimble organization. The fact that it is able to function on a number of different operational levels (with varying degrees of command and control from some central authority exercised) also means that it does not have one set modus operandi nor any single identifiable footprint. This is at least partially a reflection of the organizational and operational abilities, vision, attention to detail and level of planning and patience and finally business and management acumen that bin Laden has brought to the group in his role as charismatic leader.

This constellation of characteristics was clearly evident in the enormity and sheer scale of the simultaneous suicide attacks carried out by al-Qa'ida on September 11<sup>th</sup> eclipse anything we have previously seen in terrorism. Among the most significant characteristics of the operation were its ambitious scope and dimensions; impressive coordination and synchronization; and the unswerving dedication and determination of the 19 aircraft hijackers who willingly and wantonly killed themselves, the passengers and crews of the four aircraft they commandeered and the approximately three thousand persons working or visiting both the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.

Indeed, in terms of lethality alone the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks are without precedent. For example, since 1968, the year credited with marking the advent of modern, international terrorism, one feature of international terrorism has remained constant despite variations in the number of attacks from year to year. Almost without exception,<sup>19</sup> the United States has annually led the list of countries whose citizens and property were most frequently attacked by terrorists.<sup>20</sup> But, until September 11<sup>th</sup>, over the preceding 33 years a total of no more than perhaps 1,000 Americans had been killed by terrorists either overseas or even within the U. S. itself. In less than 90 minutes that day, nearly three times that number were killed.<sup>21</sup> To put those uniquely tragic events in

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<sup>19</sup> The lone exception was 1995, when a major increase in non-lethal terrorist attacks against property in Germany and Turkey by the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party) not only moved the US to the number two position but is also credited with accounting for that year's dramatic rise in the total number of incidents from 322 to 440. See Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, *Patterns of Global Terrorism 1999*. Washington, D.C., U.S. Department of State Publication 10321, April 1996, p. 1.

<sup>20</sup> Several factors can account for this phenomenon, in addition to America's position as the sole remaining superpower and leader of the free world. These include the geographical scope and diversity of America's overseas business interests, the number of Americans traveling or working abroad, and the many U.S. military bases around the world.

<sup>21</sup> See "Timetables of the Hijacked Flights," in Reporters, Writers, and Editors of Der Spiegel Magazine, *Inside 9-11: What Really Happened* (NY: St. Martin's, 2002), pp. 261-262.

context, during the entirety of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century no more than 14 terrorist operations killed more than 100 persons at any one time.<sup>22</sup> Or, viewed from still another perspective, until September 11<sup>th</sup>, no terrorist single operation had ever killed more than 500 persons at one time.<sup>23</sup> Whatever the metric, therefore, the attacks that day were unparalleled in their severity and lethal ambitions.

Significantly, too, from a purely terrorist operational perspective, *spectacular* simultaneous attacks such as took place on September 11<sup>th</sup>—using far more prosaic and arguably conventional means of attack (such as car bombs, for example)—are relatively uncommon. For reasons not well understood, terrorists typically have not undertaken coordinated operations. This was doubtless less of a choice than a reflection of the logistical and other organizational hurdles and constraints that all but the most sophisticated terrorist groups are unable to overcome. Indeed, this was one reason why we were so galvanized by the synchronized attacks on the American embassies in Nairobi and Dar-es-Salaam three years ago. The orchestration of that operation, coupled with its unusually high death and casualty tolls, stood out in a way that, until September 11<sup>th</sup>, few other terrorist operations had. During the 1990s, perhaps only one other terrorist operation evidenced those same characteristics of coordination and high lethality: the series of attacks that occurred in Bombay in March 1993, when ten coordinated car bombings rocked the city, killing nearly 300 persons and wounding more than 700 others.<sup>24</sup> In the preceding two decades there were comparatively few successfully executed, simultaneous terrorist spectacles.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Brian M. Jenkins, "The Organization Men: Anatomy of a Terrorist Attack," in James F. Hoge, Jr. and Gideon Rose, *How Did This Happen? Terrorism and the New War* (NY: Public Affairs, 2001), p.5.

<sup>23</sup> Some 440 persons perished in a 1978 fire deliberately set by terrorists at a movie theater in Abadan, Iran.

<sup>24</sup> Celia W. Dugger, "Victims of '93 Bombay Terror Wary of U.S. Motives," *New York Times*, 24 September 2001.

<sup>25</sup> Apart from the attacks on the same morning in October 1983 of the U.S. Marine barracks in Beirut (241 persons were killed) and a nearby French paratroop headquarters (where 60 soldiers perished); the 1981 hijacking of three Venezuelan passenger jets by a mixed commando of Salvadoran leftists and Puerto Rican *independistas*; the attacks on the Rome and Vienna airports staged by the Abu Nidal Group in December 1986; and the dramatic 1970 hijacking of four commercial aircraft by the PFLP (Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine), two of which were brought to and then dramatically blown up at Dawson's Field in Jordan, there have been comparatively few successfully executed, simultaneous terrorist spectacles. Several other potentially high lethality simultaneous attacks during the 1980s were averted. These include, a 1985 plot by Sikh separatists in India and Canada to simultaneously bomb three aircraft while in flight (one succeeded: the downing of an Air India flight while en route from Montréal, Québec, to London, England, in which 329 persons were killed); a Palestinian plot to bomb two separate Pan Am flights in 1982 and perhaps the most infamous and ambitious of all pre-September 11<sup>th</sup> incidents: Ramzi

Finally, the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks not only showed a level of patience and detailed planning rarely seen among terrorist movements today, but the hijackers stunned the world with their determination to kill themselves as well as their victims. Suicide attacks differ from other terrorist operations precisely because the perpetrator's own death is a requirement for the attack's success.<sup>26</sup> This dimension of terrorist operations, however, arguably remains poorly understood. In no aspect of the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks is this clearer than in the debate over whether all 19 of the hijackers knew they were on a suicide mission or whether only the four persons actually flying the aircraft into their targets did. It is a debate that underscores the poverty of our understanding of bin Laden, terrorism motivated by a religious imperative, in particular, and the concept of martyrdom.

The so-called *Jihad Manual*, discovered by British police in March 2000 on the hard drive of an al-Qa'ida member's computer is explicit about operational security (OPSEC) in the section that discusses tradecraft. For reasons of operational security, it states, only the leaders of an attack should know all the details of the operation and these should only be revealed to the rest of unit at the last possible moment.<sup>27</sup> Schooled in this tradecraft, the 19 hijackers doubtless understood that they were on a one-way mission from the time they were dispatched to the US on their mission of martyrdom. Indeed, the video tape of bin Laden and his chief lieutenant, Dr. Ayman Zawahiri, recently broadcast by the Arabic television news station *al Jazeera* contains footage of one of the hijackers acknowledging his impending martyrdom in an allusion to the forthcoming September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks. On the tape, Ahmad Ibrahim Al Haznawi, one of the hijackers who provided the "muscle" and was not the pilot aboard the American Airlines flight which crashed into the Pentagon on September 11<sup>th</sup>, contained a date and place name beside his reproduced signature indicating that it was recorded in Khandahar, Afghanistan around March 2001. In it, Al Haznawi bluntly explains that he is a martyr being deployed to America to kill Americans.<sup>28</sup>

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Ahmed Yousef's "Bojinka" plan to bring down 12 American airliners over the Pacific. See Jenkins, "The Organization Men: Anatomy of a Terrorist Attack." p. 6.

<sup>26</sup> See Yoram Schweitzer, "Suicide Terrorism: Development and Main Characteristics," in The International Policy Institute for Counter-Terrorism at the Interdisciplinary Center Herzliya, *Countering Suicide Terrorism: An International Conference* (Jerusalem and Hewlett, NY: Gefen, 2001), p. 76.

<sup>27</sup> See bin Laden's comments about this on the videotape released by the U.S. Government in November 2001, a verbatim transcript of which is reproduced in Reporters, Writers, and Editors, *Inside 9-11: What Really Happened*, pp. 313-321.

<sup>28</sup> See Howard Schneider and Walter Pincus, "Bin Laden Video Includes Sept. 11 Praise," *Washington Post*, 16 April, 2002.

The phenomenon of terrorist martyrdom in Islam has of course long been discussed and examined. The act itself can be traced back to the Assassins, an off-shoot of the Shia Ismaili movement, who some 700 years ago waged a protracted struggle against the European Crusaders' attempted conquest of the Holy Land. The Assassins embraced an ethos of self-sacrifice, where martyrdom was regarded as a sacramental act—a highly desirable aspiration and divine duty commanded by religious text and communicated by clerical authorities. This is still evident today. An important additional motivation then as now was the promise that the martyr would feel no pain in the commission of his sacred act and would then ascend immediately to a glorious heaven, described as a place replete with "rivers of milk and wine . . . lakes of honey, and the services of 72 virgins," where the martyr will see the face of Allah and later be joined by 70 chosen relatives.<sup>29</sup> The last will and testament of Muhammad Atta, the ringleader of the September 11<sup>th</sup> hijackers, along with a "primer" for martyrs that he wrote, entitled, "The Sky Smiles, My Young Son," clearly evidences such beliefs.<sup>30</sup>

Contrary to popular belief and misconception, suicide terrorists are not exclusively derived from the ranks of the mentally unstable, economically bereft, or abject, isolated loners. In fact many of the hijackers' relatively high levels of education, socio-economic status and stable family ties were characteristics not uncommon among terrorists deployed on suicide missions.<sup>31</sup> In point of fact, in the more sophisticated and competent terrorist groups, such as the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, or Tamil Tigers), it is precisely the most battle-hardened, skilled and dedicated cadre who enthusiastically volunteer to commit suicide attacks.<sup>32</sup>

We also failed to understand and comprehend Usama bin Laden: his vision, his capabilities, his financial resources and acumen as well as his organizational skills. For bin Laden, the weapons of modern terrorism critically are not only the traditional guns and bombs, but also the mini-cam, videotape, television and the Internet. The professionally produced and edited two hour al-Qa'ida recruitment videotape that bin Laden circulated throughout the Middle East during the summer of 2001—which

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<sup>29</sup> "Wedded to death in a blaze of glory—Profile: The suicide bomber," *The Sunday Times* (London), 10 March 1996; and Christopher Walker, "Palestinian 'Was Duped into Being Suicide Bomber'," *The Times* (London), 27 March 1997.

<sup>30</sup> See Reporters, Writers, and Editors, *Inside 9-11*, on pp. 304-313.

<sup>31</sup> See, for example, Jenkins, "The Organization Men," p. 8.

<sup>32</sup> See in particular the work of Dr. Rohan Gunaratna of St Andrews University in this area and specifically his "Suicide Terrorism in Sri Lanka and India," in International Policy, *Countering Suicide Terrorism*, pp. 97-104.

according to Peter Bergen also subtly presaged the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks—is exactly such an example of what Bergen has described as bin Laden’s nimble exploitation of “twenty-first-century communications and weapons technology in the service of the most extreme, retrograde reading of holy war.”<sup>33</sup> The tape, with its graphic footage of infidels attacking Muslims in Chechnya, Kashmir, Iraq, Israel, Lebanon, Indonesia and Egypt; children starving under the yoke of United Nations economic sanctions in Iraq; and most vexatiously, the accursed presence of “Crusader” military forces in the holy land of Arabia, was subsequently converted to CD-ROM and DVD formats for ease in copying onto computers and loading onto the world-wide web for still wider, global dissemination. An even more stunning illustration of his communications acumen and clever manipulation of media was the pre-recorded, pre-produced, B-roll, or video clip, that bin Laden had queued and ready for broadcast within hours of the commencement of the American air strikes on Afghanistan on Sunday, October 7<sup>th</sup>.

In addition to his adroit marrying of technology to religion and of harnessing the munificence of modernity and the West as a weapon to be wielded against his enemies, bin Laden has demonstrated uncommon patience, planning and attention to detail. According to testimony presented at the trial of three of the 1998 East African embassy bombers in Federal District Court in New York last year by a former bin Laden lieutenant, Ali Muhammad,<sup>34</sup> planning for the attack on the Nairobi facility commenced nearly five years before the operation was executed. Muhammad also testified that bin Laden himself studied a surveillance photograph of the embassy compound, pointing to the spot in front of the building where he said the truck bomb should be positioned. Attention has already been drawn to al-Qa’ida’s ability to commence planning of another operation before the latest one has been executed in the case of the embassy bombings and the attack 27 months later on the *U.S.S. Cole*. Clearly, when necessary, bin Laden devotes specific attention—perhaps even to the extent of micro managing—various key aspects of al-Qa’ida “spectaculars.” In the famous videotape discovered in an al-Qa’ida safe house in Afghanistan that was released by the U.S. government in December 2001, bin Laden is seen discussing various, intimate details of the September 11<sup>th</sup> attack. At

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<sup>33</sup> Peter L. Bergen, *Holy War, Inc.: Inside the Secret World of Osama bin Laden* (NY: Free Press, 2001), p. 27.

<sup>34</sup> Ali Muhammad, a former major in the Egyptian Army, enlisted in the U.S. Army, where he served as a non-commissioned officer at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, teaching U.S. Special Forces about Middle Eastern culture and politics. Mohammed, among other al-Qa’ida operatives, like Wadi el-Hoge, demonstrates how al-Qa’ida found the U.S. a comfortable and unthreatening operational environment. See Hoffman, “Terrorism’s CEO,” [www.theatlantic.com/unbound/interviews/int2002-01-09.html](http://www.theatlantic.com/unbound/interviews/int2002-01-09.html).

one point, bin Laden explains how “we calculated in advance the number of casualties from the enemy, who would be killed based on the position of the tower. We calculated that the floors [that] would be hit would [be] three or four floors. I was the most optimistic of them all. . . . due to my experience in this field . . . .” alluding to his knowledge of construction techniques gleaned from his time with the family business.<sup>35</sup> Bin Laden also knew that Muhammad Atta was the operation’s leader<sup>36</sup> and states that he and his closest lieutenants “had notification [of the attack] since the previous Thursday that the event would take place that day [on September 11<sup>th</sup>].”<sup>37</sup>

The portrait of bin Laden that thus emerges is richer, more complex, and more accurate than the simple caricature of a hate-filled, mindless fanatic. “All men dream: but not equally,” T.E. Lawrence, the legendary Lawrence of Arabia, wrote. “Those who dream by night in the dusty recesses of their minds wake in the day to find that it was vanity: but the dreamers of the day are dangerous men, for they may act their dream with open eyes, to make it possible.”<sup>38</sup> Bin Laden is indeed one of the dangerous men that Lawrence described. At a time when the forces of globalization, coupled with economic determinism, seemed to have submerged the role the individual charismatic leader of men beneath far more powerful, impersonal forces, bin Laden has cleverly cast himself as a David against the American Goliath: one man standing up to the world’s sole remaining superpower and able to challenge its might and directly threaten its citizens.

Indeed, in an age arguably devoid of ideological leadership, when these impersonal forces are thought to have erased the ability of a single man to affect the course of history, bin Laden—despite all our efforts—managed to taunt us and strike at us for years even before September 11<sup>th</sup>. His effective melding of the strands of religious fervor, Muslim piety and a profound sense of grievance into a powerful ideological force stands—however invidious and repugnant—as a towering accomplishment. In his own inimitable way, bin Laden cast this struggle as precisely the “clash of civilizations” that America and its coalition partners have labored so hard to negate. “This is a matter of religion and creed; it is not what Bush and Blair maintain, that it is a war against terrorism,” he declared in a videotaped speech broadcast over al Jazeera television on

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<sup>35</sup> Reporters, Writers, and Editors, *Inside 9-11*, p. 317.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 319.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 317.

<sup>38</sup> T.E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1977), p. 23.

November 3, 2001. "There is no way to forget the hostility between us and the infidels. It is ideological, so Muslims have to ally themselves with Muslims."<sup>39</sup>

Bin Laden, though, is perhaps best viewed as a "terrorist CEO": essentially having applied business administration and modern management techniques learned both at university and in the family's construction business<sup>40</sup> to the running of a transnational terrorist organization. Indeed, what bin Laden apparently has done is to implement for al-Qa'ida the same type of effective organizational framework or management approach adapted by corporate executives throughout much of the industrialized world. Just as large, multinational business conglomerates moved during the 1990s to flatter, more linear, and networked structures, bin Laden did the same with al-Qa'ida.

Additionally, he defined a flexible strategy for the group that functions at multiple levels, using both top down and bottom up approaches. On the one hand, bin Laden has functioned like the president or CEO of a large multinational corporation: defining specific goals and aims, issuing orders, and ensuring their implementation. This mostly applies to the al-Qa'ida "spectaculars": those high-visibility, usually high-value and high-casualty operations like September 11<sup>th</sup>, the attack on the *Cole*, and the East Africa embassy bombings. While on the other hand, he has operated as a venture capitalist: soliciting ideas from below, encouraging creative approaches and "out of the box" thinking and providing funding to those proposals he finds promising. Al-Qa'ida, unlike many other terrorist organizations, therefore, deliberately has no single, set modus operandi: making it all the more formidable. Instead, bin Laden encourages his followers to mix and match approaches: employing different tactics and different means of attack and operational styles as needed. At least four different levels of al-Qa'ida operational styles can be identified:

- (A) *The professional cadre*. This is the most dedicated, committed and professional element of al-Qa'ida: the persons entrusted with only the most important and high value attacks—in other words, the "spectaculars." These are the terrorist teams that are pre-determined and carefully selected, are

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<sup>39</sup> Neil MacFarquhar with Jim Rutenberg, "Bin Laden, in a Taped Speech, Says Attacks in Afghanistan Are a War Against Islam," *New York Times*, November 4, 2001, p. B2.

<sup>40</sup> Bin Laden is a graduate of Saudi Arabia's prestigious King Abdul-Aziz University, where in 1981 he obtained a degree in economics and public administration. He subsequently cut his teeth in the family business, later applying the corporate management techniques learned both in the classroom and on the job to transform al Qa'ida into the world's preeminent terrorist organization. See Bergen, *Holy War, Inc.*, pp. 14-15.



provided with very specific targeting instructions and who are generously funded (e.g., to the extent that during the days preceding the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks, Atta and his confederates were sending money back to their paymasters in the United Arab Emirates and elsewhere).

- (B) *The trained amateurs.* These are individuals much like Ahmed Ressam, who was arrested in December 1999 at Port Angeles, Washington State, shortly after he had entered the U.S. from Canada. Ressam, for example, had some prior background in terrorism, having belonged to Algeria's Armed Islamic Group (GIA). After being recruited into al-Qa'ida, he was provided with a modicum of basic terrorist training in Afghanistan. In contrast to the professional cadre above, however, Ressam was given open-ended targeting instructions before being dispatched to North America. He was only told was to attack some target in the U.S. that involved commercial aviation. Ressam confessed that he chose Los Angeles International Airport because at one time he had passed through there and was at least vaguely familiar with it. Also, unlike the well-funded professionals, Ressam was given only \$12,000 in "seed money" and instructed to raise the rest of his operational funds from petty thievery—e.g., swiping cell phones and lap tops around his adopted home of Montreal. He was also told to recruit members for his terrorist cell from among the expatriate Muslim communities in Canada and the U.S. In sum, a distinctly more amateurish level of al-Qa'ida operations than the professional cadre deployed on September 11<sup>th</sup>; and which also relied on someone far less steeled, determined and dedicated than the hijackers proved themselves to be. Ressam, of course, panicked when he was confronted by a Border Patrol agent immediately upon entering the U.S. By comparison, nine of the 19 hijackers were stopped and subjected to greater scrutiny and screening by airport personnel on September 11<sup>th</sup>. Unlike Ressam, they stuck to their cover stories, didn't lose their nerve and, despite having aroused suspicion, were still allowed to board. Richard Reid, the individual who attempted to blow up an American Airlines passenger plane en route from Paris to Miami with an explosive device concealed in his shoe, is another example of the trained amateur. It should be emphasized, however, that as inept or even moronic as these individuals might appear, their ability to be lucky even once and then to inflict incalculable pain and destruction should not be lightly dismissed. As distinctly second-tier al-Qa'ida operatives, their masters likely see them as expendable:



having neither the investment in training nor the requisite personal skills that the less numerous, but more professional, first-team al-Qa'ida cadre have.

- (C) *The local walk-ins.* These are local groups of Islamic radicals who come up with a terrorist attack idea on their own and then attempt to obtain funding from al-Qa'ida for it. This operational level plays to bin Laden's self-conception as a venture capitalist. An example of the local walk-in is the group of Islamic radicals in Jordan who, observing that American and Israeli tourists often stayed at the Radisson Hotel in Amman, proposed to, and were funded by al-Qa'ida, to attack the tourists on the eve of the millennium. Similarly, the cell of Islamic militants who were arrested in Milan in October 2001 after wiretaps placed by Italian authorities revealed discussions of attacks on American interests being planned in the expectation that al-Qa'ida might fund them, is another. A more disquieting example, however, is the group of Islamic radicals associated with, but not formally a part of, al-Qa'ida, who plotted to attack the American and Israeli embassies and the British and Australian High Commissions in Singapore, as well as a subway stop used by U.S. sailors disembarking their ships on shore leave in that city. Borrowing a page from the al-Qa'ida playbook, the Singapore plotters spent at least four years planning their attacks, conducting the same detailed and meticulous reconnaissance emblematic of other al-Qa'ida spectacles.
- (D) *Like-minded insurgent, guerrillas and terrorists.* This level embraces existing insurgent or terrorist groups who over the years have benefited from bin Laden's largesse and/or spiritual guidance; received training in Afghanistan from al-Qa'ida; or have been provided with arms, materiel and other assistance by organization. These activities reflect bin Laden's "revolutionary philanthropy": that is, the aid he provides to Islamic groups as part of furthering the cause of global jihad. Among the recipients of this assistance have been insurgent forces in Uzbekistan and Indonesia, Chechnya, the Philippines, Bosnia and Kashmir, etc. This philanthropy is meant not only hopefully to create a jihad "critical mass" out of these geographically scattered, disparate movements, but also to facilitate a quid pro quo situation, where al-Qa'ida operatives can call on the logistical services and manpower resources provided locally by these groups.

Underpinning these operational levels is bin Laden's vision, self-perpetuating mythology and skilled acumen at effective communications. His message is simple. According to bin Laden's propaganda, the U.S. is a hegemonic, status quo power; opposing change and propping up corrupt and reprobate regimes that would not exist but for American backing. Bin Laden also believes that the U.S. is risk and casualty averse and therefore cannot bear the pain or suffer the losses inflicted by terrorist attack. In this respect, bin Laden has often argued that terrorism works—especially against America. He cites the withdrawal of the U.S. Marines, following the 1983 barracks bombing, from the multi-national force deployed to Beirut and how the deaths of 18 U.S. Army Rangers (an account of which is described in the best-selling book by Mark Bowden, *Black Hawk Down*, and current film of the same title)—a far smaller number than in Beirut a decade before—prompted the precipitous U.S. withdrawal from Somalia a decade later.

Finally, it should never be forgotten that some 20 years ago bin Laden consciously sought to make his own mark in life as a patron of *jihad*—holy war. In the early 1980s, he was drawn to Afghanistan, where he helped to rally—and even more critically, fund—the Muslim guerrilla forces resisting that country's Soviet invaders. Their success in repelling one of the world's two superpowers had a lasting impact on bin Laden. To his mind, Russia's defeat in Afghanistan set in motion the chain of events that resulted in the collapse of the USSR and the demise of communism. It is this same self-confidence coupled with an abiding sense of divinely ordained historical inevitability that has convinced bin Laden that he and his fighters cannot but triumph in the struggle against America. Indeed, he has often described the U.S. as a "paper tiger": on the verge of financial ruin and total collapse—with the force of Islam poised to push America over the precipice.

Remarkably given his mindset, bin Laden would likely cling to the same presumptions despite the destruction of the Taleban and liberation of Afghanistan during this first phase of the war against terrorism. To him and his followers, the U.S. is doing even more now than before to promote global stability (in their view: preserve the status quo) and ensure the longevity of precisely those allegedly morally bankrupt regimes in places like Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the Gulf, Pakistan, Uzbekistan and elsewhere whom bin Laden and his followers despise. In bin Laden's perception of the war in Afghanistan, most of the fighting was done by the Northern Alliance—the equivalent of the native levies of imperial times; though instead of being led by British officers as in the past, who were now guided by U.S. military special operations personnel. Moreover, for bin Laden—like guerrillas and terrorists everywhere—not losing is winning. To his mind,

even if terrorism didn't vanquish his hated enemy on September 11<sup>th</sup>, he can still claim to have been responsible for having a seismic effect on the U.S., if not the entire world. Whatever else, bin Laden is one of few persons who can argue that they have changed the course of history. The U.S., in his view, itself remains fundamentally corrupt and weak, on the verge of collapse, as bin Laden crowed in the videotape released last year about the "trillions of dollars" of economic losses caused by the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks. More recently, Ahmed Omar Sheikh, the chief suspect in the killing of the American journalist, Daniel Pearl, echoed this same point. While being led out of a Pakistani court in March, he exhorted anyone listening to "sell your dollars, because America will be finished soon."<sup>41</sup>

Today, added to this fundamental enmity is now the even more potent and powerful motivation of revenge for the destruction of the Taleban and America's alleged "war on Islam." Despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary, bin Laden and his followers probably still regard the U.S. as a "paper tiger," a favorite phrase of bin Laden's, whose collapse can be attained provided al-Qa'ida survives the current onslaught in Afghanistan and elsewhere in some form or another. Indeed, although weakened, al-Qa'ida has not been destroyed and at least some of its capability to inflict pain, albeit at a greatly diminished level from September 11<sup>th</sup>, likely still remains intact. In this respect, the multi-year time lag of all prior al-Qa'ida spectaculars is fundamentally disquieting since it suggests that some new monumental operation might have already been set in motion just prior to September 11<sup>th</sup>.

**In hindsight, what mistakes did the United States make with regard to the threat of terrorism? Was the U.S. government too focused on the threat of terrorists using weapons of mass destruction?**

Most importantly, we were (in this case: non-government terrorism analysts) perhaps lulled into believing that mass, simultaneous attacks in general and those of such devastating potential as we saw in New York and Washington on September 11<sup>th</sup> were beyond the capabilities of most terrorists—including those directly connected to, or associated with, Usama bin Laden. The tragic events of that September day demonstrate how profoundly misplaced such assumptions were. In this respect, we perhaps overestimated the significance of our past successes (e.g., in largely foiling a series of planned terrorist operations against American targets between the August 1998 embassy

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<sup>41</sup> Raymond Bonner, "Suspect in Killing of Reporter Is Brash and Threatening in a Pakistani Court," *New York Times*, 13 March 2002.

bombings to the November 2000 attack on the *U.S.S. Cole*, including more than 60 instances when credible evidence of impending attack forced the temporary closure of American embassies and consulates around the world) and the terrorists' own incompetence and propensity for mistakes (e.g., Ahmad Ressam's bungled attempt to enter the United States from Canada in December 1999). Both impressive and disturbing is the likelihood that there was considerable overlap in the planning for these attacks and the one in November 2000 against the *U.S.S. Cole* in Aden: thus suggesting al-Qa'ida's operational and organizational capability to coordinate major, multiple attacks at one time.<sup>42</sup>

Attention was also arguably focused too exclusively either on the low-end threat posed by car and truck bombs against buildings or the more exotic high-end threats, against entire societies, involving biological or chemical weapons or cyber-attacks. The implicit assumptions of much of American planning scenarios on mass casualty attacks were that they would involve germ or chemical agents or result from widespread electronic attacks on critical infrastructure. It was therefore presumed that any conventional or less extensive incident could be addressed simply by planning for the most catastrophic threat. This left a painfully vulnerable gap in our anti-terrorism defenses where a traditional and long-proven tactic—like airline hijacking—was neglected in favor of other, less conventional threats and where the consequences of using an aircraft as a suicide weapon seem to have been ignored. In retrospect, it was not the 1995 sarin nerve gas attack on the Tokyo subway and the nine attempts to use bio-weapons by Aum that should have been the dominant influence on our counterterrorist thinking, but a 1986 hijacking of a Pan Am flight in Karachi, where the terrorists' intention was reported to have been to crash it into the center of Tel Aviv and the 1994 hijacking in Algiers of an Air France passenger plane by Armed Islamic Group (GIA) terrorists, who similarly planned to crash the fuel-laden aircraft with its passengers into the heart of Paris. The lesson, accordingly, is not that we need to be unrealistically omniscient, but rather that we need to be able to respond across a broad technological spectrum of potential adversarial attacks.

We also had long consoled ourselves—and had only recently began to question and debate the notion—that terrorists were more interested in publicity than killing and therefore had neither the need nor the interest in annihilating large numbers of people.

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<sup>42</sup> It is now believed that planning for the attack on an American warship in Aden harbor commenced some two to three weeks before the August 1998 attacks on the East African embassies. Discussion with U.S. Naval Intelligence Service agent investigating the *Cole* attack. December 2001.

For decades, there was widespread acceptance of the observation made famous by Brian Jenkins in 1975 that, "Terrorists want a lot of people watching and a lot of people listening and not a lot of people dead."<sup>43</sup> While entirely germane to the forms of terrorism that existed in prior decades, for too long we adhered to this antiquated notion. On September 11<sup>th</sup>, bin Laden wiped the slate clean of the conventional wisdom on terrorists and terrorism and, by doing so, ushered in a new era of conflict.

Finally, before September 11<sup>th</sup> the United States arguably lacked the political will to sustain a long and determined counterterrorism campaign. The record of inchoate, unsustained previous efforts effectively retarded significant progress against this menace. The carnage and shock of the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks laid bare America's vulnerability and too belatedly resulted in a sea change in national attitudes and accompanying political will to combat terrorism systematically, globally and, most importantly, without respite.<sup>44</sup>

**How might the United States anticipate, and counter, innovative delivery means and methods that make prediction and disruption more difficult?**

See the discussion immediately below.

**What steps should the U.S. government take to improve the analysis of terrorist groups? What skills and methods should be emphasized?**

Rather than asking what could or could not happen—which is the reflexive way we tend to look at and analyze terrorist threats, we might more profitably focus on understanding what hasn't happened, and asking why these types of attacks haven't occurred and then to walk them backwards to understand the capabilities and logistics required for undertaking these operations, for the illumination this line of inquiry can shed on possible future al-Qa'ida attacks. It would also be beneficial to examine and analyze the type of terrorist incidents or attacks that have only occurred once or twice before similarly for the insight this would provide into potential future terrorist operations. These types of approaches actually remain among the most understudied and in turn conspicuous lacunae of terrorism studies. Many academic terrorism analyses when they

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<sup>43</sup> Brian Michael Jenkins, "International Terrorism: A New Mode of Conflict" in David Carlton and Carlo Schaerf (eds.), *International Terrorism and World Security* (London: Croom Helm, 1975), p. 15.

<sup>44</sup> See, for example, the discussion of two former members of the U.S. National Security Staff, Daniel Benjamin and Steven Simon, on the effects of the al-Shifa on the Clinton Administration and its counterterrorism policy post the August 1998 embassy bombings. Daniel Benjamin and Steven Simon, "A Failure of Intelligence?" in Robert B. Silvers and Barbara Epstein (eds.), *Striking Terror: America's New War* (NY: New York Review of Books, 2002), pp. 279-299.

venture into the realm of future possibilities, if at all, do so only tepidly. In the main, they are self-limited to mostly lurid hypotheses of worst case scenarios, almost exclusively involving CBRN (chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear) weapons, as opposed to trying to understand why—with the exception of September 11<sup>th</sup>—terrorists have only rarely realized their true killing potential.

Among the key unanswered questions include:

- Why haven't terrorists regularly used man-portable surface-to-air missiles (SAMs/MANPADS) to attack civil aviation?
- Why haven't terrorists employed such simpler and more easily obtainable weapons like rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs) to attack civil aviation by targeting planes while taking off or landing?
- Why haven't terrorists used unmanned drones or one-person ultra-light or micro-light aircraft to attack heavily defended targets from the air that are too difficult to gain access to on the ground?
- Why haven't terrorists used remote-controlled (even home-made) mortars from fixed positions against targets difficult to attack or access from the ground?
- Why haven't terrorists engaged in mass simultaneous attacks with very basic conventional weapons, such as car bombs, more often?
- Why haven't terrorists used tactics of massive disruption—both mass transit and electronic (cyber)—more often?
- Why haven't terrorists perpetrated more maritime attacks, especially against cruise ships loaded with holidaymakers or cargo vessels carrying hazardous materials (such as liquefied natural gas or LNG)?
- Why haven't terrorists engaged in agricultural or livestock terrorism (which is far easier and more effective than against humans) using biological agents?
- Why haven't terrorists exploited the immense psychological potential of limited, discrete use of CBRN weapons and cyber attacks more often?
- Why haven't terrorists targeted industrial or chemical plants with conventional explosives in hopes of replicating a Bhopal with thousands dead or permanently injured?
- And, finally, why—with the exception of September 11<sup>th</sup>—do terrorists generally seem to lack the rich imaginations of Hollywood movie producers, thriller writers, and others?

Alarmingly, many of the above tactics and weapons have in fact already been used, albeit infrequently, by terrorists—and often with considerable success. The 1998 downing of a civilian Lion Air flight from Jaffna to Colombo by Tamil Tigers using a Russian-manufactured SA-14 is a case in point. The aforementioned series of nearly a dozen car bombings that convulsed Bombay in March 1993 is another. The IRA's effective paralyzing of road and rail commuting traffic around London in 1997 and 1998 is one more as were the similar tactics used by the Japanese Middle Core to shut down commuting in Tokyo a decade earlier. And in 1997, the Tamil Tigers launched one of the few documented cyber-terrorist attacks when they shut down the servers and e-mail capabilities of the Sri Lanka embassies in Seoul, Washington, D.C., and Ottawa. The Tigers also have a special maritime suicide terrorist unit, the "Sea Tigers," that have attacked Sri Lankan naval (and on rare occasion, civilian) vessels for the more than a decade. As these examples illustrate, terrorists retain an enormous capability to inflict pain and suffering without resorting to mass destruction or mass casualties on the order of the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks. This middle range, between worse case scenario and more likely means of attack is where the U.S. remains dangerously vulnerable. Terrorists seek constantly to identify vulnerabilities and exploit gaps in our defenses. It was precisely the identification of this vulnerability in the middle range of our pain threshold that led to the events of that tragic day.

**Are there lessons the United States can learn from other countries that are appropriate for the struggle against terrorism?**

A survey of the counter-terrorism lessons learned from five countries' experiences covering five key functional areas, was conducted by RAND<sup>45</sup> this past winter and led to four principal conclusions that are summarized below.<sup>46</sup>

*1. Focus efforts at mid-level leaders in terrorist groups.* Our analysis indicates that mid-level leaders are often more important than top decision-makers to the long-term survival of a terrorist organization. Policies aimed at removing these mid-level leaders

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<sup>45</sup> See Bruce Hoffman and Kim Cragin, "Four Lessons from Five Countries" in *RAND REVIEW—Hitting Home: What We've Learned Since 9/11 and What We Should Do About It*, vol. 26, no. 2 (Summer 2002), pp. 42-43

<sup>46</sup> The five countries include Israel, the Philippines, Colombia, Peru, and the U.K. The five functional areas that we addressed are intelligence, disinformation, emergency legislation, targeting terrorist leaders and disrupting support networks.



more effectively disrupt control, communications, and operations up and down the chain of command. In addition, such policies may also inhibit a group's long-term growth by eliminating the development of future leaders. For example, Israel has often targeted the top leadership of Hezbollah and Hamas. But this policy has not resulted in a dramatic decrease in terrorist attacks or the dissolution of either group. The mid-level leaders of Hezbollah, in particular, have been able to step into the new role of top decision-makers relatively easily. In the case of Hamas, Israel managed to deport almost its entire top-level leadership in 1992. But the removal of Hamas' top (relatively more moderate) leaders served to radicalize the group – the mid-level leaders that stepped up in 1992 increased the use of suicide bombers to the extent that is seen in attacks against Israel today. These examples illustrate our conclusion that targeting the top leaders of a terrorist group is often a less effective policy. The success or failure of a terrorist organization's operations and even perhaps its longevity often depends on the ability of the mid-level leaders to step into decision-making roles or carry out operational objectives more than on the top leaders themselves.

*2. De-legitimize – do not just arrest or kill – the top leaders of terrorist groups.*

The top leaders of terrorist organizations are more than just policy-makers for the group. They occupy an enormously influential and important symbolic position at the head of a terrorist organization that is often inextricably connected to that organization's very existence. Therefore the public diplomacy campaign to discredit these leaders is as, or even more, important than their actual arrest or death. Some analysts credit the arrest in 1991 of Sendero Lumioso leader Abimel Guzman for the fall of SL. But another, often overlooked, component of Fujimori's strategy was to discredit Guzman thoroughly before SL members and their support network. Fujimori did this by turning Guzman's own words against him, deliberately orchestrating public speeches in which Guzman first called for SL members to give up their weapons and then abruptly reversed himself, telling them instead to continue to fight against the government. These discrepancies essentially discredited Guzman, and SL lost all forward momentum. Turkey achieved the same success after Abdullah Ocalan, the founder and leader of the Kurdish group, the PKK, was imprisoned.

*3. Focus on disrupting support networks and trafficking activities.* A further measure involves targeting essential support and logistics networks. This tactic primarily entails focusing on the middlemen that help terrorist organizations access funds and purchase supplies in the black market: financiers and smugglers. Attention is often



focused on front organizations and individuals that provide money to terrorist organizations. Our analysis, however, indicates that it would be more advantageous to expand this approach and target specifically the middlemen that (e.g.) purchase diamonds from terrorists on the black market, or individuals that (e.g.) sell weapons to terrorist organizations. This tactic is a more effective way of disrupting the everyday activities that a terrorist organization must engage in to maintain its operational capabilities. It hinders the ability of a group to gather resources and plan sophisticated attacks in advance because they cannot rely on a steady stream of money or other essential resources.<sup>47</sup> For example, Colombian efforts to disrupt arms trafficking activities have been more successful than coca eradication. The Colombian military has managed to do this by focusing intelligence and investigative resources on financiers and arms trafficking middlemen (external to the FARC itself). FARC communiqués and reported discussions have indicated that the organizational leadership has become increasingly concerned about the loss of necessary weapons into the country. It may be that the Colombian Armed Forces will be able to deprive FARC of crucial supplies to the extent that such activities will impinge on the group's ability to expand or even maintain control over territory in Colombia and therefore conduct operations in the medium to long term.

4. *Establish a dedicated counter-intelligence center specifically to engage terrorist reconnaissance.* More sophisticated terrorist groups do not attack people or places without a basic level of planning and reconnaissance. Therefore arguably the greatest return on investment is in the identification and disruption of pre-attack planning as well as logistical operations. A key means of achieving this is through the discernment of the terrorists' own intelligence-gathering processes. Yet we determined that none of the countries surveyed had a dedicated, stand alone, terrorist counter-intelligence unit.<sup>48</sup> This misses an important opportunity for pre-empting a terrorist attack. Given the highly fluid and transnational nature of the threat that the United States is facing, we recommended that the U.S. establish a separate counter-terrorism unit dedicated specifically to identifying and targeting the intelligence gathering and reconnaissance activities of terrorist organizations.

<sup>47</sup> This policy will not, however, have as dramatic an impact on groups that rely on less-sophisticated tactics in regions where it is easy to find explosives for rough devices.

<sup>48</sup> In contrast to the specially dedicated counter-intelligence or counter-espionage units generally found in the intelligence and security services and many law enforcement agencies throughout the world.

**How might the threat from al-Qa'ida and associated groups change in the future?**

The more sophisticated terrorist entity is perhaps best viewed as the archetypal shark in the water. It must constantly move forward to survive and indeed to succeed. While survival entails obviating the governmental countermeasures designed to unearth and destroy the terrorists and their organizations; success is dependent on overcoming the defenses and physical security barriers designed to thwart attack. In these respects, the necessity for change in order to stay one step ahead of the counterterrorism curve compels terrorists to change: adjusting and adapting their tactics, modus operandi, and sometimes even their weapons systems as needed.<sup>49</sup> The better, more determined and more sophisticated terrorists will therefore always find a way to carry on their struggle.

The loss of physical sanctuaries—the most long-standing effect that the U.S.-led war on terrorism is likely to achieve—will signal only the death knell of terrorism as we have known it. In a new era of terrorism, “virtual” attacks from “virtual sanctuaries,” involving anonymous cyber assaults may become more appealing for a new generation of terrorists unable to absorb the means and methods of conventional assault techniques as they once did in capacious training camps. Indeed, the attraction for such attacks will likely grow as American society itself becomes ever more dependent on electronic means of commerce and communication. One lesson from last October’s anthrax cases and the immense disruption it caused the U.S. Postal Service may be to impel more rapidly than might otherwise have been the case the use of electronic banking and other on-line commercial activities. The attraction therefore for a terrorist group to bring down a system that is likely to become increasingly dependent on electronic means of communication and commerce cannot be dismissed. Indeed, Zawahiri once scolded his followers for not paying greater attention to the fears and phobias of their enemy, in that instance, Americans’ intense preoccupation with the threat of bioterrorism. The next great challenge from terrorism may therefore be in cyber space.

Similarly, the attraction to employ more exotic, however, crude weapons like low-level biological and chemical agents may also increase. Although these materials might be far removed from the heinous capabilities of true WMD (weapons of mass destruction), another lesson from last October’s anthrax exposure incidents was that terrorists don’t have to kill 3,000 people to create panic and foment fear and insecurity: five persons dying in mysterious circumstances is quite effective at unnerving an entire nation. Accordingly, the issue may not be as much ruthless terrorist use of some mass

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<sup>49</sup> Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (NY: Columbia Univ. Press, 1998), pp. 180-183.

destruction weapon to attempt to destroy an entire city and affect its entire population as the discrete, calculated terrorist use of some chemical, biological or radiological device to achieve far-reaching psychological effects or a specific reaction from the U.S.

### **Concluding Observations**

In thinking about future threats, we need to keep at least five imperatives in mind.

First, we should recognize that terrorism is, always has been, and always will be instrumental: planned, purposeful and premeditated. The challenge that analysts face is in identifying and understanding the rationale and "inner logic"<sup>50</sup> that motivates terrorists and animates terrorism. It is easier to dismiss terrorists as irrational homicidal maniacs than to comprehend the depth of their frustration, the core of their aims and motivations, and to appreciate how these considerations affect their choice of tactics and targets. To effectively fight terrorism, we must gain a better understanding of terrorists and terrorism than has been the case in the past.

Second, we need to recognize that terrorism is fundamentally a form of psychological warfare. Terrorism is designed, as it has always been, to have profound psychological repercussions on a target audience. Fear and intimidation are precisely the terrorists' timeless stock-in-trade. Significantly, terrorism is also designed to undermine confidence in government and leadership and to rent the fabric of trust that bonds society. It is used to create unbridled fear, dark insecurity, and reverberating panic. Terrorists seek to elicit an irrational, emotional response. Our countermeasures therefore must be at once designed to blunt that threat but also to utilize the full range of means we can bring to bear in countering terrorism: psychological as well as physical; diplomatic as well as military; economic as well as moral.

Third, the U.S. and all democratic countries that value personal freedom and fundamental civil liberties will remain vulnerable to terrorism. The fundamental asymmetry of our inability to protect all targets all the time against all possible attacks ensures that terrorism will continue to remain attractive to our enemies. In this respect, both political leaders and the public must have realistic expectations of what can and cannot be achieved in the war on terrorism and, indeed, the vulnerabilities that exist inherently in any open and democratic society.

Fourth, the enmity felt in many places throughout the world towards the U.S. will likely not diminish. America is invariably targeted as a hegemonic, status quo power and

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<sup>50</sup> My colleague at St Andrews University, Dr Magnus Ranstorp's, formulation.

more so as the world's lone superpower. Diplomatic efforts, particularly involving renewed public diplomacy activities are therefore needed at least to effect and influence successor generations of would-be terrorists, even if we have already missed the current generation.

Finally, terrorism is a perennial, ceaseless struggle. While a war against terrorism may be needed to sustain the political and popular will that has often been missing in the past, war by definition implies finality. The struggle against terrorism, however, is never-ending. Terrorism has existed for 2,000 years and owes its survival to an ability to adapt and adjust to challenges and countermeasures and to continue to identify and exploit its opponent's vulnerabilities. For us to succeed against terrorism, our efforts must be as tireless, innovative and dynamic as our opponents.